STUDENT CORE CURRICULUM PLAN
FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Technical Assistance Supplement
to help districts meet requirements of IC 279.61 (2005 Sup) as amended by SF 2272

Effective with the 2006-07 school year, Iowa law requires all students to complete a high school and career development plan (hereafter referred to as "**STUDENT CORE CURRICULUM PLAN**") by the end of their 8th grade year.

By law, those plans must at a minimum include:
- Intent to complete the district's core curriculum by the time the student graduates from high school.
- Career options.
- An outline of the coursework needed in grades 9-12 to support the student's post-secondary education and career options.
- A parent or guardian signature, if the student is under age 18.

The law specifically states that it is the local school board's responsibility to ensure the Student Core Curriculum Plans are completed properly. This technical assistance supplement outlines the steps local school district leaders should take to meet the requirements of the law.
1. Identify the district's core curriculum.
2. Establish a process and system for the development and implementation of student plans to meet core requirements.
3. Establish a process for reporting to the student and parent/guardian the student's progress toward meeting the goal of successfully completing the core curriculum.

For each step, this document identifies the minimum requirement as stated in the statute and a listing of quality characteristics that districts might consider as they develop their approach to the Student Core Curriculum Plan. Existing resources and examples that demonstrate quality characteristics are also included. Answers to frequently asked questions about the law can also be found in the primary Technical Assistance Guide dated October 2, 2006.

Districts seeking help in communicating these new requirements to their staff and parents can find sample letters, flyers, postcards, and other materials in the GPS communications toolkit located at http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/hsbf/comm_toolkit.html.

1. Understand the new state graduation requirements of 4-3-3-3 and determine which courses can be counted.

A 2006 law requires that, beginning with the graduating class of 2011, all Iowa high school students must take four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of social studies, and three years of science to graduate. Districts will locally determine which courses offered by the district match the new graduation requirements.

In addition to the state law mandating graduation requirements, the State Board of Education in the spring of 2006 endorsed the Model Core Curriculum for Iowa High Schools. This core curriculum clearly articulates the essential concepts and skill sets in science, mathematics, and literacy that students must know and be able to demonstrate to be successful in post-secondary endeavors — whether that is in the classroom or the workplace. As a district determines the courses it will accept as part of the 4-3-3-3 requirements, educators are encouraged to review local curriculum to ensure that the Model Core Curriculum skills and concepts are part of the educational program of every graduate.

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2. Establish a process for development of individual Student Core Curriculum Plans.

Districts that already have a process for student plans should review their process to ensure that it meets the requirements set forth in IC 279.61, and whether it continues to meet the district's needs.

Districts that do not have student plans will need to ask and answer five questions to initiate a process for developing student plans:

2.1. What are the district's desired outcomes of the Student Core Curriculum Plan?
2.2. Who should be involved in developing and implementing the plan?
2.3. When will it be done and how will it be used?
2.4. What does it include and what is it based on?
2.5. What does it look like?

The remainder of this section identifies the minimum that districts must do and describes strategies for ensuring quality planning systems that help students grow, prepare, and succeed.

2.1 What are the district's desired outcomes of the Student Core Curriculum Plan?

District-wide implementation of student plans can benefit students, parents and the district in a number of different ways. For example, students and families benefit when they are more active participants in the student's education, which means they are more invested in a successful result. They also gain reassurance that the student's education is progressing toward an agreed-upon college or career goal.

Quality planning systems can also help the district increase student results such as 1) the number of students who complete the core curriculum, 2) student abilities to prepare for and access post-secondary education/training, 3) the percentage of students who attend post-secondary education/training, and 4)

the percentage of students who complete post-secondary education. When combined with data regarding activities of district graduates following high school, quality-planning systems also allow districts to evaluate course and program success. Other outcomes of student planning systems include better community awareness of and involvement in district preparation of students to access post-secondary training.

One district, for example, had a dropout rate higher than parents, staff, and the community desired. As district staff explored their data and talked with students, they found that some students did not find school relevant to their individual interests and other students found the course work too easy. The district decided to implement an individualized learning plan for every student. The plan was initiated in ninth grade with an advisor/advisee relationship that was to remain consistent until the student's graduation. The district also began an evaluation of their curriculum and graduation requirements. Over time they saw an increase in their graduation rate and a decrease in their dropout rate.

> **DISTRICTS MUST:**
>
> - *Develop the plan in cooperation with the student.*
>
> - *Have parents of students under age 18 sign the plan.*

2.2. Who should be involved in developing and implementing the Student Core Curriculum Plan to grow, prepare, and succeed?

While the school should take the lead in designing, implementing, and monitoring each Core Curriculum Plan, the best process includes input and participation from all in the community who affect the student, including the student himself, his parent(s)/guardian, teachers, counselors, advisors, administrators, community members such as mentors, and employers.

One school district, for example, has a series of opportunities to develop and refine student plans. They begin in 7th grade by having students complete a career research project. This project is revisited in 8th grade when students meet weekly for nine weeks to learn about district graduation requirements and high school courses. The nine-week course culminates with the drafting of a four-year plan that includes the student's career interests. Once in high school, students are assigned to an advisor who will work with the student until the student graduates. High school student-parent-teacher conferences focus on reviewing and refining the student's plan. This district reports that 95% of parents participated at high school conferences in the last two years.

Planning systems that disburse responsibility across students, parents and numerous educators (e.g., teachers, counselors, advisors, and administrators) should also provide training and support to make sure all involved have the knowledge and resources they need. Examples of supports include acquainting teachers with content and methodologies of other courses, training teachers in the use of electronic planning tools, and developing forms to be used consistently.

2.3. When will it be done and how will it be used?

The law requires that planning begin when students are in 8th grade, with an initial plan to be completed by each student by the end of 8th grade. Districts determine the timing and level of detail of that planning. Some districts, as in the example above, build activities throughout the 8th grade school year to help students begin to identify interests and preferences that will help with high school course selection. Other districts simply schedule events in the spring to plan for the student's transition to high school.

A quality system for helping students plan begins early and continues throughout the student's education experience, based on the student's developmental readiness. Because the PK-12 experience is a time of exploration, growth, and refinement, it is not expected that a typical 8th grade student should know his or her exact post-secondary and career choice. Rather, the Student Core Curriculum Plan is to help students gain educational experiences that help refine their options and build the skills that prepare them for success in those choices. This means that quality student plans will evolve over time as the student gains more experience and broadens his or her skills and knowledge.

> **QUALITY STUDENT PLANS WILL EVOLVE**
> *over time as the student gains more experience and broadens his or her skills and knowledge.*

Districts establishing a quality planning system need to identify how a student's Core Curriculum Plan will be monitored and managed over time, with steps that include:

- Identifying the information that will be used to inform the plan,
- Establishing a mechanism to share that information with the planning team, and
- Formally scheduling times to monitor and refine student plans.

Districts will also need to establish procedures that take into account students who move in without an established Student Core Curriculum Plan, or with one that is not compatible with the district's established core curriculum and plan (e.g., from another district or accredited non-public school).

2.4. What does a Core Curriculum Plan include and what is it based on?

Quality student plans exceed the minimum required in Section 279.61 by the types of information they consider when establishing the plan, and in the types of information included in the plan. In order to be a true personal education guide, each Student Core Curriculum Plan should be based on multiple pieces of assessment information including student interests and preferences, self-awareness, coursework taken, academic strengths, career/work readiness, and skills. This information is then used to identify courses, experiences, and tasks that the student will need to accomplish in high school in order to be prepared for success in her chosen post-secondary and/or career options.

Post-secondary and career options are not defined in the law and, therefore, must be defined by the district. Typical post-secondary options include four-year colleges (public and private), two-year colleges (community and private), and apprenticeships or internships. For students with significant disabilities post-secondary options may include adult and community education.

> **IN ORDER TO BE A TRUE PERSONAL EDUCATION GUIDE,** *each core curriculum plan should be based on multiple pieces of assessment information, including student interests and preferences, self-awareness, coursework taken, academic strengths, career/work readiness, and skills.*

Districts also have several alternatives to help them define career options, including career clusters and career pathways. Appendix A lists some national and local career classification systems for districts to review. Districts may also want to identify any potential regional resources and determine the categorization system the resources use to identify career options. For example, some community colleges have developed their own set of career clusters. Other areas of the state have workplace learning centers that act as a broker for helping students with career options and work-based learning. Some software packages have career options included in the planning materials.

Quality plans that help students grow, prepare, and succeed also include a record of students' experiences and accomplishments, including experiential learning, community involvement, and work-based learning. They also identify the resources necessary for the student, parents, and school staff to complete the plan.

2.5. What does a Core Curriculum Plan look like?

Each district will obtain or design its own Student Core Curriculum Plan, although several models and templates are available from Area Education Agencies, the Iowa Department of Education, or from various online resources.

> **IOWA CHOICES** *is an online planning tool available free of charge to students in every district. Contact* 877-272-4692 *or* www.collegeplanning.org/iowachoices/IndexE.html *for more information. Iowa CHOICES is updated regularly with the latest career statistics, salary information, and college options; and the system can be individualized with specific district information and requirements.*

Components that are typical of plans include:
   a) Targeted post-secondary options,
   b) Targeted career option,
   c) Courses the student is planning to take and when they will be taken,
   d) Activities the student plans to accomplish and when they will be accomplished, and
   e) Courses already taken and activities already completed.

More comprehensive plans may also include
   a) Detailed information about the student's progress and performance, and
   b) Resources needed to complete the plan.

When designing the plan, a district may choose either a paper or electronic format. The most sophisticated of these, and perhaps easiest to use and most popular among students, are the electronic versions. Appendix B describes the most common electronic student planning tools used in Iowa.

The majority of Iowa districts have selected to use Iowa CHOICES, Iowa's Career Information and Decision-Making System, which is available free to all districts. CHOICES is web-based and designed to equip teachers, administrators, and counselors with the knowledge and skills needed to assist students and parents with career exploration and information, as well as knowledge about educational opportunities and financing. Iowa CHOICES is updated regularly with the latest career statistics, salary information, and college options; and the system can be individualized with specific district information and requirements. Each student creates a portfolio that she can update as often as she chooses, from any computer at home, school, or other location. The system is completely secure and confidential, ensuring that only the student and his advisory team has access to his portfolio.

Key design features of any electronic planning systems include student data displays, performance summary reports for tests and skills, benchmark summary reports, needs analysis reports, interactive work sample entry and maintenance, direct links to resources, direct links to other student information system data, interactive maintenance of a student's plan, and comparison of a student's plan to grade-level, high school and post high school requirements.

The district will want to make sure that whichever format is selected, it:

- Is easily accessible to all (students, parents, staff, and administrators) yet also secure and confidential.
- Interfaces with other information, including assessments and school and state databases.
- Is simple to prepare, update, and revise.
- Can be tailored to meet individual student and family needs.
- Can be customized to meet school needs.

3. Establish process for reporting to the student and parent/guardian the student's progress toward meeting the goal of successfully completing the core curriculum.

To report progress, districts must identify how and when progress will be measured. Districts will also decide what it will report to students and parents and how it will be reported. The remainder of this section identifies the minimum that districts must do and describes strategies for ensuring quality systems.

3.1. What will be measured to determine student success?

A student's progress in successfully completing courses the district has determined meet the core curriculum will need to be reported each year.

Whatever system the district chooses to measure student performance, it should include discreet enough measures to show progress over time and be able to be tailored to reflect the progress of each student. Best practice would also tell us that multiple measures should be used to assess student progress.

> **DISTRICTS MUST REPORT ANNUALLY:**
>
> - *The student's progress toward meeting the goal of successfully completing the district core curriculum.*
> - *To the student and the parent/guardian for students under age 18.*

3.2. How frequently will progress be monitored?

In order to report progress on core curriculum, student progress must be measured at least once a year. Districts may choose to measure more frequently (at the end of each semester, for instance), or may choose to measure some students more frequently than others.

3.3. What will be reported and how will it be reported?
Progress should be reported in terms that are meaningful to the student and parent. It should include updates on completion of core coursework and a listing of courses yet to be completed. The report should also summarize whether the student remains on track to achieve his goals.

To ensure that students and parents thoroughly understand the information, it may be helpful to use multiple methods and times to report student progress. For example, a district could choose to include a brief summary of progress on the core curriculum on each report card. Then, at the spring reporting requirement provide a more in-depth description. Districts selecting an electronic planning system can provide students and parents with access codes that permit them to review progress in real time. System-generated emails can be set up to prompt parents and students to review the student plan at specific times through out the year.